



ON THE FIRST CHURCH AT FURNESS.

BY HAROLD BRAKSPEAR, F.S.A.

IN this short paper I have no intention of entering into the history of monachism; but it will be necessary to remember one or two leading facts, in order to follow the interesting changes that took place at Furness in, or shortly after, the year 1148.

From the seventh to the tenth centuries the only regular order of monks in western Europe was that composed of the followers of St. Benedict of Nursia (who died about 542). At the end of this period numberless disputes arose as to the true reading of the rule that he formulated. Abuses crept in and great laxities were allowed to prevail, in order to check which various reforms were instituted in individual abbeys. The principal of these was at Clugny, which in a short time became the head house of a distinct order, with a rule of its own. More than twenty other orders of reformed Benedictines arose in the next four hundred years, but of these it will be necessary to consider only the Cistercians and Savignians.

The Cistercians owe their origin to a disagreement that arose between the abbot of Molesme and some of his convent over the interpretation of the rule in 1098. He,

with some twelve monks, left the place in disgust, and by the leave of Hugh, the archbishop of Lyons, and through the assistance of Otho, duke of Burgundy, founded the abbey of Citeaux for the restoration of the ancient rule in its simplicity. From Citeaux (*Cistercium*), in the diocese of Chalons, the order took its name. Among these monks of Molesme was one Stephen Harding, an Englishman, formerly a monk of Sherborne, in Dorset, who in 1109 became the third abbot of Citeaux. During his term of office thirteen new houses were founded, and in 1116 the general chapter of the order was called together for the first time.

In 1113 Bernard, who afterwards became the great father of the Cistercians, entered Citeaux as a novice, and within two years was sent out at the head of the third filiation of that house, which settled at Clairvaux. Under this wonderful man the order increased to such an extent that in 1151 there were no less than five hundred houses, and the general chapter of that year decreed that no others should be founded; but, nevertheless, by the middle of the thirteenth century there were no fewer than one thousand eight hundred.* Of these nearly a hundred were in the British Isles. Besides following the Benedictine rule, the Cistercians had numberless extra statutes, some having reference to the buildings will be noticed later.

The order of Savigny was founded by Vitalis, a Norman of good family, who after various vicissitudes settled down with a numerous following at Savigny, in Avranches, in 1112. This order was also a reformed Benedictine, but with additional rules of its own. It increased rapidly, and included twelve houses in England.

* T. J. Beck, *Annales Furnesienses*, 77 et seq.

In 1124 Geoffrey, the second abbot of Savigny, obtained a grant from Stephen, count of Boulogne, afterwards King of England, of the vill of Tulket in Amounderness, on the banks of the Ribble, to found there a monastery of his order.* This colony, which was the fourth sent out from Savigny, seems to have been dissatisfied with the site, for three years later the same benefactor granted "to Almighty God, St. Trinity of Savigny, and the abbot of the same place the whole of his forest of Furness."† Out of this vast tract the monks chose the secluded valley called Bekansgill, two miles west of Dalton, in which to erect their new monastery, and building operations on a large scale seem immediately to have been commenced.

In 1148 Serlo, the fourth abbot of Savigny, at a general chapter of the Cistercian order, surrendered his house, with all those dependent upon it, into the hands of St. Bernard, to become henceforward members of the Cistercian order. He sent Guido, his prior, with letters to this effect to all Savignian houses in England, and with commands to immediately assume the Cistercian habit and rule, as had been decreed by the Pope Eugenius III.‡

The abbey of Furness, apparently quite content with the old rule, dispatched their abbot, Peter of York, to the Pope to appeal against the change. He was successful in his mission, but on his return was waylaid by the Savigny monks, who forcibly carried him off, stripped him of his abbey, and compelled him to learn the Cistercian rule. It is gratifying to read that he did this to such good purpose that he was subsequently made abbot of Quarr, in the Isle of Wight.§ In the meanwhile

* T. J. Beck, *Annales Furnesienses*, 110. † *Ibid*, 112.

‡ *Ibid*, 76. § *Ibid*, 129.

a foreigner, Richard of Bayeux, was appointed in his place at Furness, where the convent seems to have conformed to the new state of things and become good Cistercians.

It is now necessary to see how these historical changes affected the plans of monasteries, more particularly with respect to their churches.

Long before the eleventh century the disposition of the chief buildings required to house a monastic community had been brought to a systematic arrangement, as will be seen by the well-known ninth century plan of St. Gall.

The buildings immediately connected with the daily life of the inmates were grouped around a square court or cloister, with the church, the most important factor, either on the north or south side.*

The great monastic churches erected in this country immediately following the Conquest were all of the unreformed Benedictine order, and show a great variety of plan; but all were cruciform, with an eastern arm with aisles and apsidal end, transepts with eastern chapels, and nave with aisles, a great central tower, and sometimes one or two western ones.

There were two distinct types of eastern terminations: the first had the side aisles continued round the apse, as at Worcester, Gloucester, Norwich, and Winchester, and, for convenience, is known as the ambulatory type. In a number of cases the whole eastern arm is raised upon a crypt, as at Worcester, Gloucester, and Winchester. In the second type the aisles terminated in line with the centre of the eastern apse, and their east ends were apsidal internally and square externally, as at Durham, Ely, Peterborough, and St. Albans.

* This depended entirely on the contour of the ground, the church being kept above the cloisters for ease of drainage.

There are also two different types of transept. The more usual had no side aisles; but had two or more projecting apsidal chapels eastward. The other type had east and west aisles, with the arcade continued across the north and south ends, and is now found only at Ely and Winchester, built by the brothers Symeon and Walkelyn respectively, but a similar arrangement existed in the secular churches of old St. Paul's and possibly old Sarum.

The difference of plan in the presbyteries and transepts bear no connection with each other, as Ely has the second type of east end and Winchester the ambulatory type.

The first reformed Benedictine establishment in this country was founded at Lewes in 1077 by William earl of Warrenne for monks from Clugny, followed in a short time by numerous others of the same order.

As very few of the sites have been excavated it is impossible to speak definitely upon the plan of the first churches of the order; but, if Castleacre be taken as an example, they consisted of an eastern arm with aisles, all finished by apses, transepts with apsidal chapels, nave with aisles, a central and two western towers.

This completes the types of great churches in this country erected during the sixty years following upon the Norman Conquest, and in no case is any found without side aisles to the presbytery and an apsidal east end.*

At this period the two orders of reformed Benedictines under consideration were introduced into England, namely, the Savignians at Furness in 1127 and the

* Gundulf's church at Rochester is an exception, but the whole plan is so abnormal that it need not be considered. It was being built within thirty miles and at the same time as Lanfranc's church at Canterbury, which was quite normal with the second type of east end.

Cistercians at Waverley in 1128. Their origin and amalgamation has already been referred to.

Respecting the plans of Savignian churches even less is known than of the Clugniacs, as in all cases of which remains exist the early work has been altered after the junction with Citeaux in 1148, and until further sites are excavated it is impossible to say if they bore any marked similarity to each other.

Of Cistercian churches there are numerous examples, and of those founded during the first fifty years from the introduction of the order into this country none differ materially from each other except in point of size.*

They always consisted of a remarkably short eastern arm, with square end and no aisles; transepts with two or more square chapels to the east, separated from one another by solid walls; a disproportionately long nave, with aisles separated therefrom by solid walls, and a low tower over the crossing.

The plan for large churches is so entirely different from anything which preceded, and yet so universal to the Cistercians, that it must have been introduced in a perfected form with the order.

The engrossing subject of tracing the origin of this remarkable plan must be left to others, but once the origin is explained, the universal similarity is not difficult to account for. The statutes enact that every new monastery had to be colonised by an abbot and twelve monks sent out from an older house, and these were not to take up their residence till certain necessary buildings were ready for their occupation, namely, a church, a frater, a dorter, a guesthouse, and a porter's lodge, which

* The first church at Waverley may be claimed as an exception, as the nave was without aisles and the transepts had but one eastern chapel to each, but the general proportion is similar.

in many cases were of necessity temporary wooden structures.*

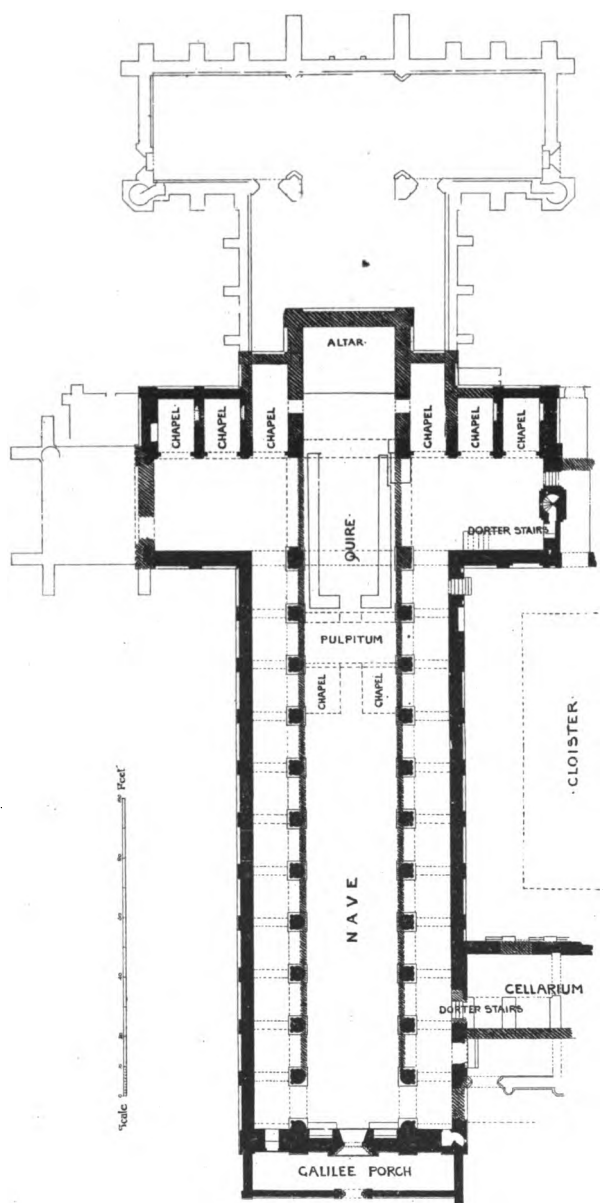
Every abbot had to attend the general chapter at Citeaux once a year, save those of very remote houses, who had their stated times of attendance. Every father abbot had yearly to visit his daughter houses, consequently all houses were annually visited in turn and in yearly communication with the main body. As an outcome of this system similarity of plan and architecture was absolutely necessary. In addition, no abbey was to be founded in a city, castle, or village, but in places remote from human intercourse. All churches were to be dedicated in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary; towers of stone, for bells, were not to be made, neither of wood to an immoderate height, "quæ ordinis dedecent simplicitem;" all glass for windows was to be white; all things superfluous and notably curious in sculpture, pictures, buildings, pavements, and other similar things were forbidden, and the visiting abbots are particularly enjoined to take note of such.†

No wonder Cistercian architecture in its first stages was so dissimilar from contemporary work, and appeals so strongly to the taste, with its grand simplicity, devoid of ornament or other unnecessary appendages. As only the early work when the Cistercian fervour was at its height is being considered, there is no occasion to refer to the various modifications that were made from time to time, and the ultimate degeneracy to things "curious," which were held in such abhorrence by the early fathers of the order.

One other peculiarity of the order must be noticed, and

* *Nomasticon Cisterciense* (1892), 215.

† *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, ix. 240, 338.



NO 1

FOUNTAINS

that is the position of the *conversi* or lay brothers. These men, among other orders, were merely servants drawn from among the lower classes, but with the Cistercians they were of the same social standing to the monks themselves, the difference between them being that a *conversus* was illiterate and a monk could read and write,* or was supposed to. They were housed in connection with the cloister, in the large western range known as the *cellarium*, and had a separate frater and dorter, with night stairs to the church like the monks, and an infirmary. They held a chapter to themselves, but used the monks' chapter-house,† and also had separate stalls in the church.

The plan (No. i.) of the great church at Fountains is an excellent example of a Cistercian church, erected immediately after the introduction of the order into this country. It was built under the direction of Geoffrey, a monk of Clairvaux, sent expressly by St. Bernard to instruct the first founders of Fountains in the Cistercian rule.‡ A considerable portion was completed in 1147, and suffered severely by fire in that year. The eastern arm was taken down in the thirteenth century, to make way for a new presbytery; but the original walls yet remain underground, and are shown hatched on the plan. The north wall of the transept was destroyed for the erection of a great tower in the fifteenth century. The plan exhibits the main features, already mentioned as being inseparable from a church of the order, and, in addition, the building retains many evidences of the internal fittings. These are of different dates, and it is difficult to say which are original except by comparison with other examples. The monks' quire occupied the

* *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, x. 503.

† *Ibid.*, x. 507.

‡ *Ibid.*, vol. xv. 272.

whole of the crossing and the first bay of the nave. The north and south arches were filled by solid screens at the back of the stalls, which continued throughout the length of the nave, save, perhaps, in the westernmost bay.* Behind the quire, at the first pair of piers from the east, was a transverse screen, and a similar screen was at the next pair. These supported the *pulpitum*, from whence the gospel and epistle were sung on holy days. Each screen was pierced by a central doorway, and flanking that from the nave were two small chapels.

Mr. W. H. St. John Hope has clearly proved that part of the nave of Cistercian churches was occupied by the quire of the *conversi*,† thus accounting for the solid walls between the arches, which were used generally at the back of stalls. These stalls could not have occupied the whole nave, but were probably towards its western end.

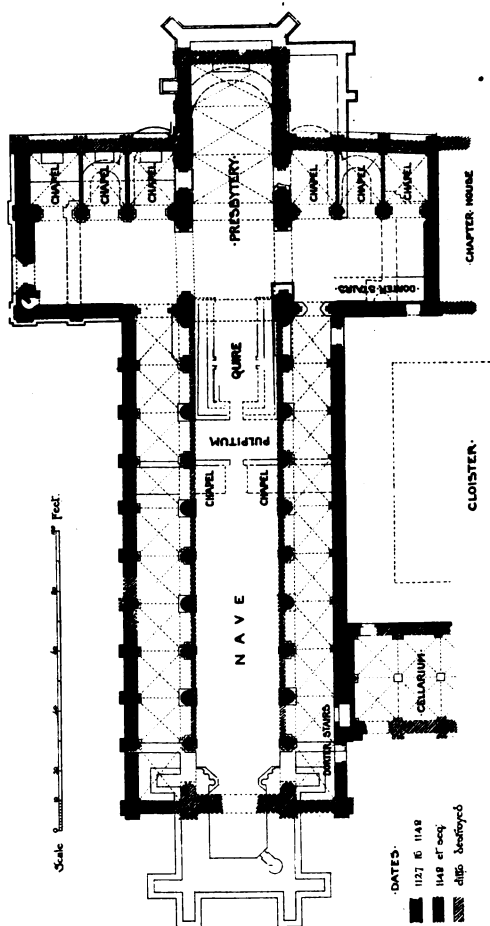
Besides the doorway at the west end of the monks' quire (*inferior introitus*) there were other entrances (*superior introitus*), one on each side east of the stalls. These were usually formed by stopping the screen wall behind the stalls a few feet short of the eastern crossing piers; but at Fountains Mr. Hope suggests that the upper entrances were eastward of the piers from the first (as they most undoubtedly were after the enlargement of the presbytery) and so account for the elongation of the chapels next the presbytery, the only point in the whole plan different from other Cistercian churches.‡

Another point peculiar to the Cistercians is that the

* These were a universal Cistercian feature, but in all cases have been removed in later days, except at the back of the quire stalls.

† *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, xv. 310.

‡ A similar arrangement of chapels is not uncommon to other orders, and in each case we find the upper entrances in the position suggested here, as at the Austin canons' church at Lilleshall and the Benedictine church at Ewenny.



western procession door is placed outside the western range and not opposite the west walk of the cloister, the reason being that the Sunday procession passed through the *cellarium* instead of returning to the church by the cloister.

Across the whole west front at Fountains is a spacious open porch; this was a Cistercian peculiarity, but their churches in this country were as often without it as with it.

The completed twelfth century church at Furness (plan ii.), though slightly smaller, is a counterpart of Fountains, with the short presbytery without aisles; transepts with three chapels in each arm and a nave with aisles separated therefrom by walls; in fact, everything on a purely Cistercian model.

Of this church the major part remained till the suppression. The presbytery was rebuilt in the fifteenth century; but retains a portion of the earlier work in the western bay on either side, together with a considerable piece of the side walls eastward.

The crossing piers remain complete with the eastern arch; but the south-west one has been cased and strengthened in the fifteenth century, owing to a settlement that doubtless was due to the heightening of the tower.

The north and south transepts remain; but with altered clerestories and ends of the fifteenth century. The eastern chapels were converted into aisles at the same time, from above the plinth-level. The nave remained till the suppression; but is now in a very ruined condition. The western bay and front had been previously destroyed in the fifteenth century, to make way for a new tower that was perhaps never finished. The internal arrangements were precisely similar to Fountains, excepting that

the monks' quire was placed entirely under the nave, consequently throwing the *pulpitum* and flanking chapels further westward.

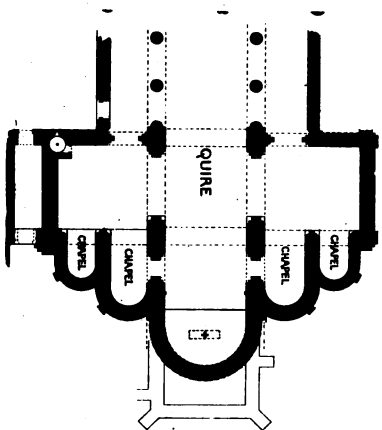
By carefully examining the remaining portions of the twelfth century work it will be seen to be of two distinct dates. These earlier portions are shown black on the plan and remain to varying heights that will be described later. They consist of: (1) the crossing piers; (2) the responds of the arch at the end of the north aisle, with one bay of the west wall of the transept beyond; (3) the responds of the arch across the south aisle and the whole length of the west wall of the transept externally and one bay, as on the north side, internally; and (4) the whole length of the south aisle wall next the cloister.

Although this work is indisputably earlier than the rest of the twelfth century work, one or two things are difficult of explanation. After careful consideration only one solution could be arrived at and that was, the church, of which these earlier portions were a part, had transepts of only two bays in length.

Upon my suggestion, Mr. W. H. St. John Hope, who has spent a great deal of time and labour in elucidating the architectural history of the abbey,* caused excavations to be made that eventually led to the discovery of the whole of the eastern parts of the original church, save the termination of the presbytery. The foundations thus disclosed, and which are shown on plan iii., with the later work omitted for clearness, are of a church without parallel in this country, so far as is at present known. It consisted of a presbytery, north and south transepts, with two unequal-sized apsidal chapels to the east of each, and

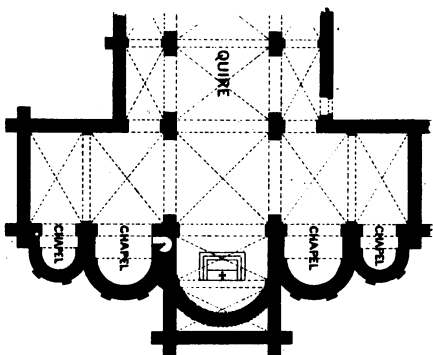
* *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*, xvi. 221-302.

FURNESS



SCALE 0 10 20 30 Feet.

VAUX DE CERNAY



Nº 3

a nave with aisles, and without doubt is part of the first church raised on this site by the Savigny monks when they first settled at Furness in 1127.* How far the work was completed at the time of the amalgamation with Citeaux is very doubtful, the building of a great church was a long matter in those early days. Probably the presbytery, transepts, and one bay of the nave with its south aisle wall was as far as the Savigny monks proceeded.

Of this first church the presbytery was twenty-seven feet wide, but its length is uncertain. The western bay on either side remains to a considerable height, and retains on both sides the outer member of a round arch, ten feet wide, that opened into the side chapels.

All the rest of the walls above the later floor-level have been recased in the fifteenth century, but underground are further very interesting remains. The jamb plinths of both arches exist, and eastward is a narrow pilaster, nine inches wide without a base, obviously the lower portion of a vaulting shaft. To the east of these pilasters, on both sides the presbytery, fifteen inches above the plinth of the arches, is a chamfered string course that apparently was the projecting member of a stone seat. This continues eastward from the pilasters twelve and a half feet on the north side and ten feet on the south. On the north, at the point where the seat stops, the footings beneath gradually come inwards, and are then broken off in a manner suggestive of supporting an apse, as shown on the plan. The floor-level of the western bay was some three feet beneath the fifteenth century level. At five

* It is to be hoped that the discovery at Furness of the pre-Cistercian church will lead to other Savigny sites being excavated under proper supervision, in order to add to the scant information upon churches of this order.

feet east of the pilasters the footings rise twelve inches, indicating that the floor also rose at this point, which will be seen from the plan is exactly where the altar steps should come if the eastern termination was apsidal.*

The south transept was thirty feet from north to south and twenty-eight feet wide. The west wall retains both jambs of the arch† leading into the nave-aisle to their full height. The rest of the wall remains to the height of nine feet, and has a chamfered plinth internally that stops twenty-five feet from the crossing. At this point is a large block of foundations projecting into the transept that carried a vice or spiral staircase of considerable size, which would be used as the night stairs to the dorter. The south wall was five feet in thickness, but nothing remains but the foundations. The east wall was entirely removed and the foundations obliterated by the second work, except at the south-east angle, where there is externally a group of clasping pilaster buttresses.

Externally towards the cloister the west wall stands for some eleven feet in height, and has along the top a chamfered weathering that formed a drip over the first cloister roof. At the foot of the wall is a plain chamfered

* I am compelled to differ from Mr. St. John Hope in attributing the whole of the work that was found below the present level and the side arches in the western bay to the first work, for (1) if the arches were of the Cistercian church, which Mr. Hope contends, they would be in connection with the transept aisle vaults, which were of the usual quadripartite form with diagonal ribs, and there is no case that I am aware of in this country where the Cistercians used anything but a pointed arch in that position; (2) there is no other case where arches occur between the presbytery and transept aisles, which, considering the uniformity of Cistercian planning, is a strong argument of their non-Cistercian date; and (3) the whole of the work is considerably beneath the level of the Cistercian church, as shown by the bases of the transept arcades.

† This archway has been filled by a small fifteenth century one, to strengthen the abutment of the tower.

plinth as on the inside. To light the vice is a narrow loop eight feet above the ground. The old wall continues of the same height for fifteen feet beyond the transept, and contains a round-headed doorway of a single member that led to the cemetery passage between the transept and chapter-house.

The foundations of the other end of the passage were found in line with the main east wall of the transept.

The foundations of the southernmost of the eastern chapels remains complete. It was ten feet wide and twelve feet in length. Towards the south-east it has a pilaster buttress externally.

The other chapel between this and the presbytery has been destroyed, but the foundations remain, though partly covered by the later work that cut right across its apse.

The north transept was precisely similar to the south, except that it was two feet longer. The west wall next the crossing retains the jambs of the arch into the nave aisle; the wall beyond continues up to the angle internally, to a height of about six feet, and has a similar plinth to that on the south side. The plinth externally has been destroyed by the insertion of one of the later period.

The north wall remains as high as its external plinth, which is continued round a similar group of pilasters at the north-east angle, as occurs at the south-east of the south transept. Of the eastern chapels the northern retains the inner face of the apse complete, and probably also the outer face, but this was unable to be opened out, owing to later work above. The chapel next the presbytery retains twelve feet of its outside face beyond the line of the later aisle wall, which shows it to have been twenty feet in length. The width was thirteen feet. Each pier of the crossing remains to its full height, but the capitals are of the later date. The responds of the

east and west arches are carried on corbels, at a height of about twelve feet above the old floor. This would give the impression that the Savigny quire was beneath the crossing as at Fountains, and in that case the arches on either side the presbytery would be used as the upper entrances.

Of the nave only the respond against the north-west pier of the crossing remains.* It consists of a half cylinder with moulded cap and base, the latter about two feet below the later level. The first bay of the nave is narrower than the rest, and, although now all of the second date, it suggests that this bay was completed in the first place as abutment for the crossing arches and afterwards altered.

The south aisle wall, as already stated, still remains, and towards the cloister is entirely of the first work. It retains a considerable length of the drip mould over the cloister roof, similar to that in the west wall of the transept. Internally it was mostly recased and divided into bays by wall shafts to carry the vaulting of the later church. The east procession door was also altered at the same time. At the end of the west wall of the cloister is a gap where, probably in Savigny times, was the western procession door, blocked up by the Cistercians and again formed into a doorway when the building of the new west tower destroyed the later doorway to the west of the *cellarium*. Where the aisle is covered by the *cellarium*, the wall thickens to eight feet, in order to enclose a greese or straight staircase that led to the upper floor of the latter. Beyond this, westward, the early work ceases.

Immediately on the conversion of the monks to the

* The corresponding pier on the south side remains, but is cased over with fifteenth century work

Cistercian rule, so much as had been built of the Savigny church was converted and enlarged to a church of the peculiar plan and manner of the new order.

The first thing, of course, taken in hand would be the presbytery, and, as the high altar would not be disturbed before absolutely necessary, it is probable that the new east wall with a square end would be built outside the old apse. If this were the case, the new presbytery would be exactly three bays in length, of equal width to the western bay of the old work. Unfortunately, not a sign of this conversion remains, save a small portion of the plinth on the north side. The whole of this work was demolished in the fifteenth century, when the builders of that day seem again to have built their east wall outside the older one.

The transepts were next taken in hand, the southern one first. This was enlarged one bay to the south by incorporating the site of the passage from the cloister to the cemetery and building the new south wall upon the old north wall of the chapter-house.

The eastern chapels followed; but, in order not to have too few altars at which to celebrate, the old southern one seems to have been left standing. The new east wall being tied at the south end by the angle of the old chapter-house is set out of the straight so as to escape the east end of this old chapel. The northern chapel was destroyed, and probably the new one on its site completed fit for use before the southern one was interfered with. The east wall of the transept was converted, and the arches into the old chapels gave place to the three now standing. The wall above these arches, which was covered by the aisle roof, contains a number of carved stones of the first work, which were perhaps considered too "curious" for re-use by the severer Cistercians.

The north transept was next altered and treated in precisely the same way as the south, save that there being no buildings contiguous to this side the enlargement of the north bay interfered with nothing pre-existing, and the east aisle is the same width throughout, so that the northernmost chapel could also have been left standing until the new work around it was completed. There seems to be a distinct pause in the work before the yet unfinished nave was proceeded with, judging from the difference of the buttresses and plinths of the transept and north aisle.

An interesting parallel is shown (plan iv.) of the eastern part of the church of Vaux-de-Cernay, in the diocese of Paris. The abbey was colonised by monks from Savigny in 1118. How far the building of the church had proceeded before the union with Cîteaux in 1148 is impossible to say, but apparently the eastern parts of the church were partially completed. I have not personally seen this abbey, but an interesting paper was published in 1889, by M. Morize, accompanied by numerous illustrations.* M. Morize states that none of the existing remains are earlier than Cistercian times, but remarks on the different style of the transept chapels, and his plates show these to be of distinctly earlier date.

If, as is obviously the case, the general part of the church was that built immediately after the Cistercian union, it follows that these chapels were of the Savigny church which preceded it. The existing remains of the presbytery show it to be square-ended, but as these are of the second period, with bold buttresses, it is probable that the first presbytery of the date of the chapels was apsidal; else why was it rebuilt in so few years. The

* *Société Archéologique de Rambouillet*, xviii.

Vaux-de-Cernay monks were notoriously poor, which would account for their not troubling to alter the less important apses of the transepts, as we have seen was done at Furness.

If an apse be struck from a centre in line with the centres of the side apses, as at Furness, the plan is precisely similar, and the high altar falls into its proper position. If this were the case it will be noticed that the later east end was built outside the apse, as I suppose was done at Furness.

I cannot conclude this paper without thanking my friend Mr. W. H. St. John Hope for the loan of his excellent ground plan of the ruins from which my plans of the church are traced; also for calling my attention to the paper on Vaux de Cernay, just referred to, and for much other valuable assistance.

I also acknowledge drawing largely for the historical information relating to Furness from the well-known work of T. J. Beck, and for that of the Cistercian order from the papers on Cistercian statutes by the Rev. J. T. Fowler, published in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh volumes of the *Yorkshire Archæological Journal*.

